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ABSTRACT

Not only is service learning a buzz word in the academy, but it is also a phenomenon discussed by those in private and non-academic public arenas. In the Spring 2000 semester a small-group communication class educator implemented the idea of her students completing a semester-long service learning project. This paper details the steps the educator took to ensure the project's success, including the execution of the project and the end results. The paper outlines the following: assignment objectives; pre-assignment planning; the assignment (in three phases); post-experience; and reflection. It also contains the assignment, a verification log, and a grading rubric. (NKA)

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Small Group Communication and Service Learning

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K. N. Hubbert

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CS 510 554

Small Group Communication and Service Learning

Assignment Rationale:

To those who keep up with current events, the notion of service learning (a.k.a. volunteering, community service, charity work, etc.) is certainly not new. Not only is it a buzz word in the field of academia, it is also a phenomena discussed by those in private and, non-academic, public arenas. This is evident by the plethora of articles in the newspapers highlighting and lauding those who volunteer. Articles such as "They Lead The Way," which explains adolescents' participation in National Youth Service Day (*The Orange County Register*, April 9, 2000), "Helping Hands," which recounts the story of a teen who began a community-service project for his bar mitzvah yet turned such an experience into a weekly commitment, and finally "Volunteers Give Back: children from troubled homes help build house for needy family in Mexico" (*The Orange County Register*, April 2000), which recounts the joy teens experience, even when they themselves are from broken homes, helping others. Along with such articles, however, are equal numbers of pleas for folks to give back to their community (e.g., *The Orange County Register's* Trouble Shooter column with its numerous requests: "Organizations in need of volunteers," "How You Can Help," "Many Charities in Need of Help," etc.). As a volunteer myself, I have been aware of the importance and need for volunteers in the community. I have also been mindful of the intrinsic rewards obtained through philanthropic endeavors. Hence, requiring a small group speech communication class to complete a semester long service learning project seemed logical. I decided to finally implement the idea Spring 2000, and the results were nothing short of my expectations. This handout consists of the steps I took to ensure the project's success, including the execution of the project and the end results.

Assignment Objectives:

1. To facilitate a list of volunteer organizations in local areas
2. To contact and collaboratively volunteer at two local organizations
3. To use one's group experience to benefit society
4. To encourage critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility
5. To apply small group communication theories/concepts
5. To use PowerPoint as a vehicle to recount the group's experience

Pre Assignment Planning:

Being aware that students face several challenges: time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and potential negative attitudes about giving free "time," which we all know is a precious commodity. I knew that I needed to do my homework. In short, I had to be sure to answer the W.I.F.M. question (What Is In It For Me?), allow for plenty of time to complete the assignment, and address possible scheduling difficulties.

Addressing the W.I.F.M. question: As a former Key Club advisor, I discussed my experience with volunteering, the experience the high school Key Club participants had, and the experiences of other professionals I know. In addition, I read several articles that I have clipped from the local paper to illustrate the need, feasibility, and rewards service

learning provides. After I was through, convincing students that this assignment was not only an excellent small group experience, but also an excellent individual and community experience was not a problem.

Addressing Scheduling: Although this is never a perfect science, I was able to aide in the coordination of group member's schedules by grouping them according to outside of class availability. This enabled them to schedule the volunteering and any other out of class projects with less frustration and difficulty than a random grouping.

Addressing Time: Understanding that scheduling and time constraints would still be an issue, I assigned Phase One (see below) by the second week of class with the final project being due the week before finals. This allowed students to use holidays (e.g., spring break, president's day etc.) to complete any hours that they were simply unable to finish during their "normal" weekly schedules.

The Assignment:

Phase One:

Students were assigned three cities around the college and compiled a list of five volunteer organizations total (with at least one being from each city). Once they obtained the names and addresses of five organizations, they were required to contact the organization and ask several questions regarding volunteering opportunities. I provided both the questions to be asked and a sample phone statement to be used when contacting each company/organization. After students obtained the necessary information for at least five volunteer organizations, the groups provided a one page summary of each volunteer location (5 pages total). The papers was contained the following: Name of the organization, address and phone number of the organization, written directions to the location from Cerritos College (including a map), the name, telephone number and e-mail of the contact person. Finally, include a summary of each organization's volunteer opportunities and required training.

Phase Two:

Group members decided on an organization(s) at which they would like to volunteer. Then as a group (all members were required to attend at the same time), they completed ten hours of volunteer work. As an individual each student completed a total of five hours at a separate organization. Thus, students participated in two different types of volunteering experiences. The hours were divided up according to the groups' liking. The group did, however, need to follow the guidelines listed below.

A. All members must complete the 15 hours
B. Ten of the fifteen hours must involve the group organizing and working together on a project (e.g., developing and implementing an after school tutoring program, volunteering at a food bank, working together to complete a graffiti paint out, etc.)

C. Each group presented a contract outlining the organization(s) at which they will volunteer and stipulations of the volunteering. Stipulations refers to the exact dates and hours of commitment; proposed punishments for members who don't complete all the hours or contribute their fair share of the work (e.g., grade reduction, singing for the class, extra paper work, etc.). This contract was written and signed by all group members with one copy for each member and the original turned in before the volunteering began.

Phase Three:

After volunteering, each group completed and presented the following to the class:

a. Group members kept a journal of their experiences. In short, after each volunteering day, students reflected on what they did, how they felt, and how the group functioned together. One journal entry from each group member for each volunteer day was required. The journals need not be typed; however, the majority of the entry (about 90%-95% should discuss thoughts, feelings, and group functioning and 5%-10% should describe the activity).

b. A three to four page group paper summarizing the experience.

1. Begin with a description of the organization(s) that were worked with; and provide a thesis statement.
2. Discuss the benefits of the experience (both as a group member and a community service participant).
3. Discuss any downfalls or problems encountered.
4. A summary of what the group learned as a result of this assignment
5. Apply at least one small group communication concept or theory to some aspect of the experience (e.g., systems theory, theories on leadership, conflict, decision making,).
6. Summarize the experience

c. Using Power Point (we used the Cerritos College facilities to help with this), each group summarized the contents of their paper. In short, they discussed and critically assessed their experiences working as a group volunteer. In addition they discussed how the group used the concepts/theories in the class to successfully complete the project. Students were given 15-20 minutes to do so. I encouraged the use of photos and or video for this portion of the assignment. This, of course, is contingent upon the approval of the volunteer site.

Post Experience:

The project accomplished what it intended. The student presentations were poignant, enlightening, and entertaining. I was convinced of the project's success after listening to the enthusiasm in each student as he/she recounted the experience. Students made such statements as, "volunteering at the food ministry taught me to appreciate my dinners with my family," and "just walking into the convalescent hospital gave me a creepy feeling. . . I starting having fun once I was participating in the activities such as bingo, dancing, and exercises." Another students expressed her excitement about the experience, "I was very excited about volunteering for this community health fair because its' emphasis was to educate African-Americans about health issues (particularly high blood pressure and diabetes) and staying physically fit." Another students, who was initially apathetic, to my surprise and delight, told me that he returned to a convalescent hospital the next day to visit with patients. (These were hours beyond what was required.) These excerpts are just a few of the comments students made in their journal entries, papers, and personal discussions recounting their initial feelings about the project as well as the assignment's impact.

In addition to each group completing their task, the class experienced a very low attrition rate, with only two students dropping after the first two weeks. Although there are several factors that contribute to a low class attrition rate, it can be argued that one of the reasons for such low attrition is the cohesion that developed among group members as well as the connection that students felt to their local community as a result of the assignment. This is corroborated by the work of Vincent Tinto (1987).

Reflection:

Clearly the success of such an assignment has been an inspiration. I plan to continue the project in my future small group communication course, and I am eager to share the assignments with others. One caveat to instructors who are considering such an assignment: They must model the volunteering. In short, I make it a point to model the behavior that I advocate by volunteering. Hence, I was sure to keep current on my volunteer work and recount the stories of my volunteering to the class the following meeting. This helped to keep the students motivated and piqued their interest. Although the assignment is in its nascent stage, there are only a few modifications that I would make. My new goal is to continue to refine the assignment and incorporate service learning into other classes as well.

References

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Ryan, M. (2000, April 9). They lead the way. *Parade Magazine*, pp. 4-5.

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The Assignment and Assessment

Group Assignment #1 Service Learning

Assignment Objectives:

1. To facilitate a list of volunteer organizations in local areas
2. To contact and collaboratively volunteer at a local organization
3. To use one's group experience to benefit society
4. To encourage critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility.

Assignment Short Take:
Phase One: Research volunteer organization in an assigned geographic location.
Phase Two: Complete 15 hours of volunteer work at two different organizations.
Phase Three: Write a group paper and present your group experience to the class.

Total Materials to turn in:
1. 3-4 page group paper
2. journals
3. group contract
4. hour verification log
5. PowerPoint Presentation

Phase One: In your assigned location, see below, you are to obtain the following information:

Obtain the names and addresses of at least five volunteer organizations (e.g., YMCA, retirement homes, homeless shelters, food banks, the Humane Society, etc.). Once you have obtained the names and addresses of five organizations (within the cities assigned), you will need to contact the organization and ask the following:

a. Who does one contact if he/she wishes to volunteer? Obtain the name, phone number with extension, and (if possible) the e-mail address of the person. You will also want to be sure to have the address of the volunteer agency.
b. A description of volunteer opportunities. Is there more than one area? If so, what are they? Provide a job description of each. In short, what you do while you are volunteering (e.g., read, serve meals, organizations games, etc.).
c. How does one go about getting started? (i.e., is there any type of training involved?)
d. Are there any minimum hourly commitments? May groups participate?

Locations to research:

1. Norwalk, Downey, Bellflower
2. Cerritos, Hawaiian Gardens, Cypress
3. Lakewood, Long Beach
4. Pico Rivera, Bell, Santa Fe Springs

5. Anaheim, Fullerton, Placentia
6. Buena Park, La Mirada

Sample phone statement: Be sure to have a pen and paper with you.

"Hello my name is _____ _____ and I am a student at Cerritos College. As part of an assignment for my Small Group Communication class, my group members and I will be participating in a service learning project where we will be volunteering 15 hours of our time this semester. Before making our decision, however, we are researching a variety of organizations. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions? It will take about 10 minutes."

If the contact person does not have the time, ask when it would be convenient for you to phone back.

After you have obtained all the necessary information for at least 5 volunteer organizations, each group will provide a one page summary of each (5 pages total). The papers should be formatted as follows: Name of the organization, address and phone number of the organization, written directions to the location from Cerritos College (including a map), the name, telephone number and e-mail of the contact person. Finally, include a summary of each organization's volunteer opportunities and required training.

The paper must be uniform. In short, it must be typed in the same fashion, the information presented in the same order and format, and maps from the same source (e.g., Thomas Guide, Map Quest, etc.). Handwritten maps are not acceptable.
After this assignment has been completed by the following due date:_____, then you will receive a list of volunteer organizations and locations.

Please note the following "do not's" for phase one:
a. Do not include only one time volunteer opportunities (e.g., Halloween, Easter, etc.)
b. Do not report on organizations that don't take groups. Even though some of these hours can be completed individually, the majority of them need to be done as a group.
c. Do not down load information from the internet and staple it together. The organization should be researched, which will require that you phone them. Also, the paper should be typed for consistency.

Phase Two
Your group members will decide on an organization(s) at which they would like to volunteer. Then as a group (all members must attend at the same time), you will complete 10 hours of volunteer work. As an individual you will complete a total of 5 hours at a separate organization. Thus, you will experience two different types of volunteering experiences. The hours may be divided up according to the groups liking. The group does, however, need to follow the guidelines listed below.

A. All members must complete the 15 hours

B. Ten of the fifteen hours must involve the group organizing and working together on a project (e.g., developing and implementing an after school tutoring program, volunteering at a food bank, working together to complete a graffiti paint out, etc.)

C. Each group must present a contract outlining the organizations at which you will volunteer and stipulations of the volunteering. Stipulations refer to the exact dates and hours of commitment; the proposed punishments for group members who don't complete all the hours or contribute their fair share of the work (e.g., grade reduction, singing for the class, extra paper work, etc.). The contract (see attached) is to be signed by all group members with one copy for each member and the original turned in before the volunteering begins on _____.

Phase Three: By the following date _____, all group members will need to have their volunteer hours completed and hour verification logs turned in (see attached).

I. After volunteering, each group will complete and present the following to the class:

a. Each group member will keep a journal of his/her experiences. In short, after each volunteering day, you will reflect on what you did, how you felt, and how the group functioned together. I expect one journal entry from each group member for each volunteer day. The journals need not be typed; however, the majority of the entry (about 90%-95% should focus on your thoughts, feelings, and group functioning; 5%-10% should describe the activity).

b. A three to four page group paper summarizing your experience.

1. Begin with a description of the organizations that you worked with; and provide a thesis statement.
2. Discuss the benefits of the experience (both as a group member and a community service participant).
3. Discuss any downfalls or problems encountered.
4. A summary of what the group learned as a result of this assignment
5. Apply at least one small group communication concept or theory to some aspect of the experience (e.g., systems theory, theories on leadership, conflict, decision making.)
6. Summarize the experience

c. Using Power Point (we will be using the Cerritos College facilities to help with this), each group will summarize the contents of their paper. In short, they will discuss and critically assess their experiences working as a group volunteer. In addition you will need to discuss how your group used the concepts/theories in this class to successfully complete the project. You will have 15-20 minutes to do so. I encourage the use of photos and or video for this portion of the assignment. This, of course, will be based on the approval of the volunteer site.

Group Service Learning Project Hour Verification Log

Please neatly print the information below. You will not receive credit for volunteering if your hours are not verified.

Name: _____

Organization #1 Name: _____

Organization#1 Staff Member: _____

Date	Time In	Time Out	Total Hrs.	Verification Signature

Organization #2 Name: _____

Organization #2 Staff Member: _____

Date	Time In	Time Out	Total Hrs.	Verification Signature

Group Service Learning Grading Rubric
Phase One Grades
25 pts.

Group Member Names: (first and last)

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Phase One 25 pts.

__/25-23 All aspects of the assignment have been met. The group has researched at least five organizations, and provided a one page paper of each that includes: The name, address, and directions (both written and map); the name, phone number, and e-mail of a volunteer contact person for each organization; a description of volunteer opportunities and requirements. All aspects of the assignment are present for all five organizations, and the papers are typed, proofread, and contain a thorough description of the opportunities.

___22-20 Most aspects of the assignment have been met. The group has researched at least five organizations, and provided a one page paper of each that includes: The name, address, and directions (both written and map); the name, phone number, and e-mail of a volunteer contact person for each organization; a description of volunteer opportunities and requirements. One aspect of the assignment is not present for one organization (see below).

__The content isn't complete

__The paper is missing the name, address, or directions driven and/or map to one organization

__The paper is missing the name, address, or e-mail of the volunteer contact person at one organization

__ The description of volunteer duties is complete but lacks the thoroughness of an "A" paper.

__ The style of the paper is adequate (e.g., it is typed and proofread) but contains one to two typing errors and or grammatical/spelling errors.

___19-18 Some aspects of the assignment have been met. The group has researched at least five organizations, and provided a one page paper of each that includes: The name, address, and directions (both written and map); the name, phone number, and e-mail of a volunteer contact person for each organization; a description of volunteer opportunities and requirements. One aspect of the assignment is not present for two to three organizations (see below):

__The content isn't complete
__The paper is missing the name, address, or directions driven and/or map to two to three organizations.
__The paper is missing the name, address, or e-mail of the volunteer contact person at two to three organizations
__ The description of volunteer duties is complete but lacks the thoroughness of a "B" paper.
__ The style of the paper is adequate (e.g., it is typed and proofread) but may still have three to five typing errors and or grammatical/spelling errors.

__17-15 Few aspects of the assignment have been met. The group has researched at least five organizations, and provided a one page paper of each that includes: The name, address, and directions (both written and map); the name, phone number, and e-mail of a volunteer contact person for each organization; a description of volunteer opportunities and requirements. One aspect of the assignment is not present for three or more organizations (see below):

__The content isn't complete
__The paper is missing the name, address, or directions driven and/or map to two to three organizations.
__The paper is missing the name, address, or e-mail of the volunteer contact person at two to three organizations
__ The description of volunteer duties is complete but lacks the thoroughness of a "B" paper.
__The style of the paper is adequate (e.g., it is typed and proofread) but may still have three to five typing errors and or grammatical/spelling errors.

__14 or below there are serious flaws in this paper several aspects of the assignment have not been met. The group has not done the following: researched at least five organizations, provided a one page paper of each that includes: The name, address, and directions (both written and map); the name, phone number, and e-mail of a volunteer contact person for each organization; a description of volunteer opportunities and requirements. All aspects of the assignment are not present for all five organizations the papers are not typed, proofread, and do not contain a thorough description of the volunteer duties.

Small Group Communication
Community Service Project
Individual Grade: Phases Two and Three
25 points

Name _____

___/25 Hour Verification Log and Journals

__Individual and group verification log is complete with a minimum of 10 group hours and 5 individual hours from at least two separate organizations. All journal entries are made.

__ Individual and group verification log is incomplete and missing one of the following:

___one to two individual hours is (are) missing
___ one to two journals is (are) missing
___two or more individual hours are missing
___ two or more journals are missing
___one to two group hours are missing
___three to four group hours are missing
___ three or more journals are missing
___five or more group hours are missing
___one of the two organizations is missing (minimum requirement is two separate organizations)

*In order for the hours to count toward your grade, the log must be signed.